

The Edge of the Continent

Edisto Island, South Carolina, U.S.

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April 4, 2017 by [Scott Gilbertson](#)

We follow the river, more or less, down out of the red Georgia mud into the Carolina coastal plain. It's not always visible, but it is there, tracing a path down out of the hills and toward the sea.

We avoid interstates, even divided highways, sticking instead to the county roads, the thin gray lines on the map, many known only by local names, no number at all. Jones Rd. Thompson Bridge Rd. Stoney Bluff Rd. One blurs into the next as we pass down out of the tall Georgia pines, to mixed farmland, ever larger oaks and the first cordgrass hints of marsh.

In between are the occasional small towns, these days little more than scattered clusters of single wide trailers and abandoned downtown squares encircled by Popeye's and dollar stores. Life out here feels bleak and hopeless to me. Or at least life as it is right now. Layers of peeling advertisements still clinging to collapsed billboards hint at time when it wasn't like this.

I don't know when it became like this out here, or even how widespread it is, but it feels widespread on this drive. We pass through several whole towns that quite simply aren't there anymore. Just broken buildings and empty houses remain. It's remarkable how fast the landscape reclaims what isn't maintained.

The abandonment seems recent, within the last 20 years to judge by the advertisements still stuck inside windows here and there. But I imagine the decline started decades earlier. In fact there probably was no collapse at all. We always think things end suddenly, but with a few [dramatic exceptions](#) it seldom works out that way. Instead there's just less and less year after year until one day the last family walks slowly out of town and disappears into somewhere else.

It's become fashionable in the last couple of years for the big city glossies to send reporters out to places like this to do a lot of hand-wringing about what happened, what it all means. Very few seem willing to accept that maybe this is just part of the cycle of things. That there is no perpetual progress, that things rise up and eventually fall back down. If you think that cycle is something that only happens elsewhere, to other people, you need to get off the interstate.

The scene brightens a little as we pass into the Carolina lowcountry. The towns are older, they're at

different point in the cycle, having already declined and rebuilt several times. This is a land where people have been around long enough to get a better idea of what works and what doesn't. What remains now is what has survived the cycles thus far, what has been pruned and honed.

Finally we dip down into the intertidal plain and the road becomes covered by massive Live Oaks dripping Spanish Moss. Poking above them you can see the tufted tops of the Loblolly and Long Leaf Pines. They look like pineapples on sticks thrust up into the sky.

It's overcast, but never actually rains, which is good because I have no windshield wipers at the moment. I have a single wiper arm on the driver's side¹ and a blade I bought at a truck stop that I'm hoping I can somehow attach, but I'm waiting for a good downpour before I tackle that project. Fortunately for me the weather holds all the way to the Edisto State Park campground.

We had been promising the kids that we'd be at the beach "soon" for about six months so we literally parked the bus in our campsite and headed straight out the beach. It was chilly, overcast and generally dismal, but no one cared. There was sand and sea and salt air and the weather really doesn't much matter when you're a kid and you have everything else.

There were birds to chase, sandcastles to build, dead jellyfish to investigate, shark's teeth to gather, shells to collect and just barely enough daylight to even get started on it all before we had to head back and make dinner. Fortunately the next day was bright and sunny and apparently all you have to do if you want the shores of Edisto to yourself is show up before 11 AM.









When it's sunny and nice I never remember to take pictures. This is the only image I have.



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1. I recently noticed there's actually a motor on the passenger's side, though it has no arm and I have no idea if it works. A new motor and arm assembly that was recommended to me by another Travco owner goes for a cool \$200. Not in hurry to drop \$200 on a windshield wiper. [↩](#)

2 Comments



Bennett April 11, 2017 at 8:49 p.m.

So... (markdown isn't working for me)

I'm a wee bit jealous. No more breakdowns I assume? Just a road to nowhere.

There's nothing like being on the road. With the road there is truly the feeling of being present. Casting all fears and uncertainties aside a person can throw themselves into the abyss, hold their breath and emerge with their brain completely re-wired.

Stay fearless...



[Scott](#) April 12, 2017 at 9:24 p.m.

@bennett-

I'm leaking transmission fluid at a rate that defies the possible in my opinion (doesn't seem like there's that much in there), but otherwise she's running well.

For now. There will be breakdowns I'm sure, but for now at least, the road, the endless road.

(and what markdown didn't work? I didn't see any in your comment. It's possible that it doesn't render it for the preview, but it should work for the actual comment. Here, I'll make something *italic*... seems to work...)